

## Low Birthweight

Birthweight, along with period of gestation, is one of the most important predictors of an infant's subsequent health and survival. Low birthweight (less than 2,500 grams or about 5.5 pounds) may result from premature birth, being small for gestational age, or both of these factors. Low-birthweight infants face an increased risk of physical and developmental complications and death (1). Nearly two-thirds of infant deaths in 1997 occurred among low-birthweight babies (2).

■ In 1997–98, 9.5 percent of infants born to adolescents ages 15–19 were low birthweight. For mothers under 15 years of age, 13.2 percent of infants were low birthweight. In contrast, 7.2 percent of infants born to women in their twenties and thirties were low birthweight.

■ Low-birthweight rates vary by race and Hispanic origin. The percent of infants with low birthweight is higher among non-Hispanic black teens than among all other groups and is almost double that of American Indian or Alaska Native teens.

■ Very low-birthweight infants, those weighing less than 1,500 grams, are at the highest risk of dying in their first year. In 1997–98 the percent of very low-birthweight infants of adolescent mothers decreased with increasing maternal age among all race and ethnic groups except American Indian or Alaska Native infants.

■ A number of factors may influence low birthweight including smoking during pregnancy. The rate of smoking during pregnancy for young women ages 15–19 increased between 1994 and 1998. Young women ages 15–19 have the highest rate of smoking during pregnancy of all age groups. Among teen mothers, non-Hispanic whites have the highest smoking rates followed by Native Americans (3, 4). Very low birthweight is primarily associated with preterm birth.

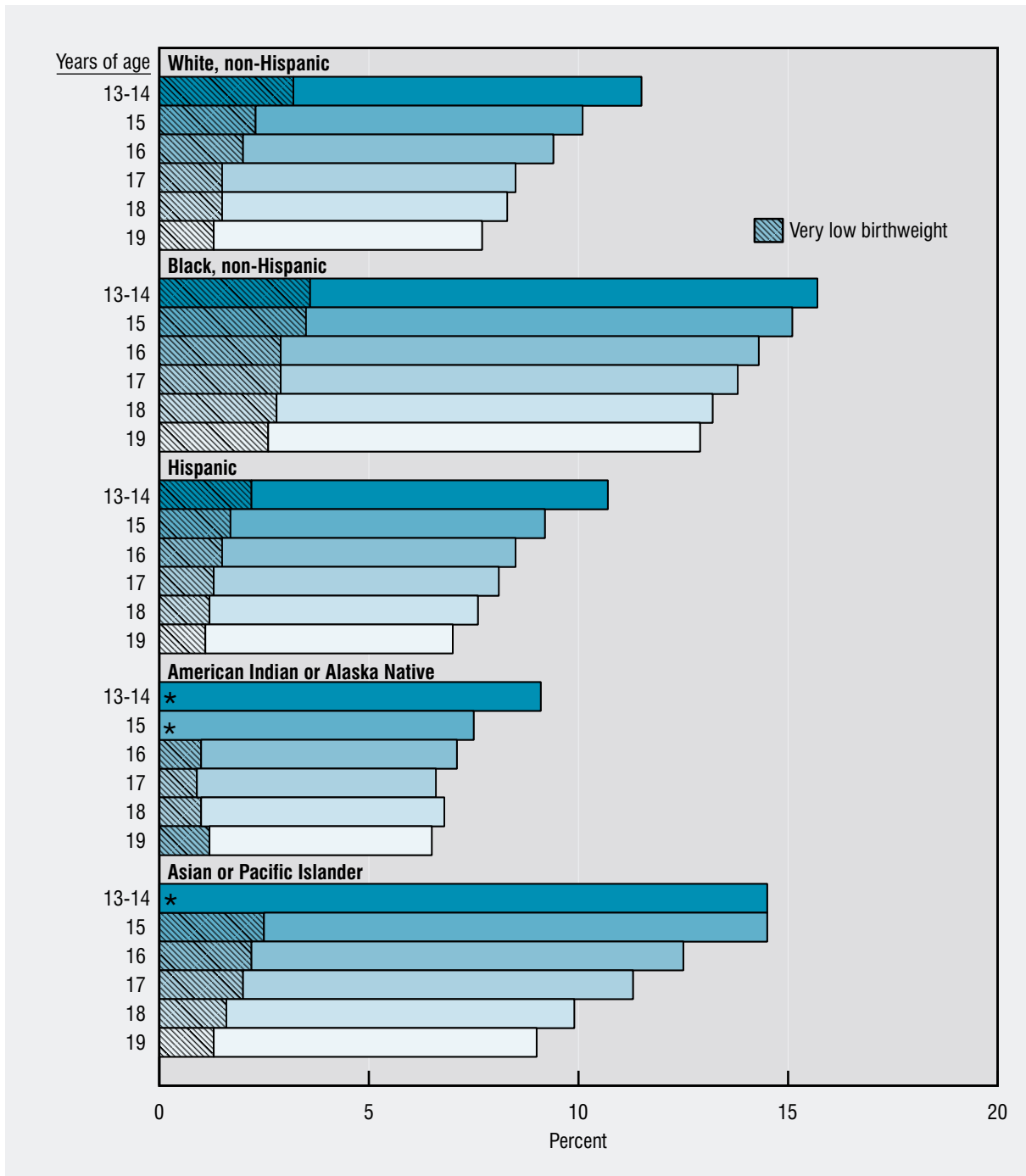
■ Healthy People 2010 objectives call for a reduction in low-birthweight births for all women to

no more than 5 percent of live births and very low-birthweight births to no more than 1 percent of live births (5).

## References

1. Ventura SJ, Peters KD, Martin JA, Maurer JD. Births and Deaths: United States, 1996. National Center for Health Statistics. 1997.
2. MacDorman MF, Atkinson JO. Infant mortality statistics from the 1997 period linked birth/infant death data set. National vital statistics reports; vol 47 no 23. Hyattsville, Maryland: National Center for Health Statistics. 1999.
3. Mathews TJ. Smoking during pregnancy, 1990–96. National vital statistics reports; vol 47 no 10. Hyattsville, Maryland: National Center for Health Statistics. 1998.
4. Ventura SJ, Martin JA, Curtin SC, Matthews TJ, Park MM. Births: Final data for 1998. National vital statistics reports; vol 48 no 3. Hyattsville, Maryland: National Center for Health Statistics. 2000.
5. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Healthy People 2010 (Conference Edition, in Two Volumes). Washington: January 2000.

Figure 21. Low-birthweight live births among adolescent mothers 13–19 years of age, by maternal age, race, and Hispanic origin: United States, average annual 1997–98



\* Very low-birthweight live births were too few to be considered reliable, and are not shown separately. See Data Table for data points graphed.  
 NOTES: Low birthweight is less than 2,500 grams; very low birthweight is less than 1,500 grams. Excludes live births with unknown birthweight.  
 SOURCE: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, National Vital Statistics System. See related *Health, United States, 2000*, table 12.